Overview of the Book of James

Date Of The Letter Of James:

It appears that the letter was written during the early period of the Jewish Christian Church. The letter was written to Jewish Christians who had been scattered among the nations. They were most likely scattered by the persecution of Jewish Christians that erupted in Jerusalem in connection with the stoning of Stephen about A.D. 32 (see Acts 7:58-8:2). Since the letter was written to Jewish Christians, and it does not include statements directed to Gentile Christians, it was probably written before the influx of Gentiles began, such as began to occur during Paul's early work in Tarsus and in Syria and Cilicia and his first missionary journey, which has been dated as A.D. 46-49. With the influx of Gentile Christians into the church the Judaistic Controversy arose, which was settled by the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem in A.D. 50. The letter makes no reference to the troubles and strife that arose with the influx of the Gentiles. Nor does it state that the Jewish Christians should not trouble the Gentile Christians over observing the laws of Moses and especially the rite of circumcision. These factors suggest that the date of writing could have been possibly around A.D. 45. Such a date makes the Letter of James the first book and letter of the New Testament to have been written.

The Writer Of The Letter Of James:

"James, a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ," James 1:1.

There are four men by the name of James in the New Testament. There is the apostle James, who was the brother of the apostle John and a son of Zebedee (see Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14). There is a second apostle named James, who was identified as "James the son of Alphaeus" (see Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). There is also a James who was the father of the apostle Judas--not Iscariot (see Luke 6:16). Then there is the James who is the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

Which of these four James wrote the letter? The James who wrote it was a man of recognized dignity and authority. His name was known to all in the early apostolic church. He was so well known and widely recognized that he did not need to identify himself further than to write "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." All would have known who he was without confusing him with the other James who are mentioned in the New Testament.

Certainly the apostle James, who was the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, was well known within the early church in Jerusalem, Judea, and Galilee. He was one of Jesus' inner circle of three together with Peter and James' brother John. He could not have written the letter, however, because King Herod Agrippa put him to death in A.D. 44, before it appears the letter was written.

The James who was the father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot) could not have written the letter either. He was not an apostle and he lacked the recognized authority in the church to have written a letter as authoritative as the Letter of James. Similarly, lacking such a recognized authority within the church, James the son of Alphaeus is a poor candidate to have been the letter's author.

This leaves James the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the most likely candidate to have written the letter. During the three years of Jesus' public ministry James, as well as his brothers Joseph, Simon, and Judas, did not believe Jesus was Christ the Son of God (see John 7:3-5). Along with his brothers and sisters James probably thought Jesus was out of his mind and had lost his senses (see Mark 3:21). James' opinion of Jesus seems to have changed when Jesus appeared to him as the risen Lord (see 1 Corinthians 15:7). After seeing Jesus risen from the dead, James came to believe in him, for by the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven forty days later he and his brothers were united in the same faith with the disciples (see Acts 1:12-14).

Already in A.D. 44 James the brother of the Lord was the recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem. Shortly after the apostle John's brother James was put to death by King Herod Agrippa, and immediately after an angel released Peter from prison to save him from the same martyrdom, Peter instructed those in the house of Mary to report his release to "James and the brothers", meaning the members of the church of Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17). In A.D. 50 James was clearly the leader of the church of Jerusalem and a recognized authority within the Apostolic Council. He voiced the final decision of the Council that the Gentiles should not be troubled about having to follow the laws of Moses, especially with regard to

circumcision, in order to be saved (see Acts 15:3-21). As a result of James' decree the apostles, elders, and church of Jerusalem then sent a letter to the churches to uphold that they were saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 15:11, 22-29). In his Letter to the Galatians, written in A.D. 51, Paul put James on a level of importance equal with that of the apostles (see Galatians 1:19), and stated that James together with Peter and John were the "reputed pillars" of the church in Jerusalem (see Galatians 2:9). James was such an influential person within the church of Jerusalem that Paul referred to Jewish Christians from Jerusalem as "some men came from James" (see Galatians 2:12). At the end of his third missionary journey when Paul brought the collection from the churches for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, he reported to James with the collection (see Acts 21:17, 18). James was so widely recognized in the early apostolic church that Jesus' brother Judas (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) introduced himself in his Letter of Jude as "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James" (Jude 1).

James had a reputation for his piety and righteousness. For this he was given the title of "James the Just", even by Jews who did not embrace Christianity. From early writings the tradition is that James died a martyrs' death between A.D. 63 and 68.

The Recipients Of The Letter Of James:

"To the twelve tribes who are dispersed among Gentile lands:[1]," James 1:1

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem scattered when the ruling council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, started persecuting them after the stoning of Stephen. They scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 8:2) and it appears to areas beyond. Wherever they had scattered to, James wrote this general letter to them from Jerusalem as their pastor to instruct and encourage them in their Christian faith and life.

The Occasion Of The Letter Of James:

No particular event or situation can be cited as the cause for the letter being written. The occasion for the writing of the letter is inferred from the contents of the letter. At its outset James encourages the Jewish Christians to rejoice in the many kinds of trials they were undergoing. He encouraged them to persevere under such trials and withstand the test of faith and the temptation that came with it. He also wrote of their being exploited by the rich who slandered the name of Christ (see James 2:6, 7). This suggests that the Jewish Christians were being hard pressed by persecution and poverty and were subject to the temptation to abandon their faith in Christ.

Throughout the letter James also addressed their numerous sins and the failure of their faith to be active in good deeds. This further suggests that they had begun to backslide in their faith and were slipping back into their old worldly ways from which they had emerged when they first came to believe in Christ.

The Purpose Of The Letter Of James:

The content of the letter suggests that James wrote his letter to instruct, correct, rebuke, and encourage early Jewish Christians with the Word of God, so they might not fall away altogether. He wrote to urge them to repent and to live their lives by faith.

The Theme Of The Letter Of James:

Live By Faith, For Faith Without Deeds Is Dead, James 2:26

James

Part 1: The Greeting James 1:1

1 ¶ James, a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ;
To the twelve tribes who are dispersed among Gentile lands:[2]
Greetings.

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[1] Lit. in the Diaspora

[2] Lit. in the Diaspora

Part 2: Live by Faith; Faith without Deeds Is Dead James 1:2-5:20

A. By Faith Take Up Your Trials James 1:2-12

¶ 2 Consider *it* all joy, my brothers, whenever you become engulfed[3] in various kinds of trials,
3 realizing that the testing of your faith produces patient endurance;
4 and let the patient endurance continue to bring about *its* finished work, so that you may be fully developed and complete in all respects, lacking in nothing.
5 And if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God,[4] who gives to all without reservation and without reproach,[5] and it will be given to him.
6 But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for the one who doubts is like the surging waves of the sea being driven and tossed here and there by the wind;
7 to be sure, let that man not begin to suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord,
8 *since he is* a double-minded man,[6] unstable in all his ways.
¶ 9 Now let the brother of lowly circumstances continue to boast in his high position,
10 But let the *brother of* wealth *continue to boast* in his spiritually degrading himself,[7] because he will pass away like a wild flower.[8]
11 For the sun rises together with the scorching heat and dries out the grass, and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance perishes; in the same also the wealthy *brother* will fade away in the course of going about his way of life.
¶ 12 Blessed is the man who endures under trial, for after he has been approved by testing, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord[9] promised to those who love him.

B. By Faith Face Up to Your Temptations James 1:13-18

¶ 13 Let no one when he is being tempted say, "I am being tempted by God." For God is incapable of being tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.
14 But each one is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own lust;
15 after that when the lust has conceived it gives birth to sin, and when the sin has been completed it gives birth to death.
¶ 16 Stop being deceived, my beloved brothers.
17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or changing shadow.[10]
18 Of his own free will he gave birth to us by the word of truth, in order that we may be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.

C. By Faith Do, as well as Hear, the Word of God James 1:19-27

¶ 19 Know *this word of truth*, my beloved brothers. Moreover, let every person be swift to listen, slow to speak,[11] slow to anger;
20 for the wrath of man does not bring about the righteousness of God.
21 Therefore having rid yourselves of all *moral* filthiness and the superabundance of evil qualities, humbly accept the word planted in you,[12] which is able to save your souls.
¶ 22 And always be doers of the word and not only hearers who deceive themselves.
23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, this person[13] is like a man who looks attentively at his natural face[14] in a mirror;

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[3] The Greek verb means to fall into and be encompassed by

[4] Lit. from God

[5] Lit. and does not reproach

[6] Meaning uncertain, wavering

[7] Lit. lowness; figuratively humiliation, spiritual abasement

[8] Lit. a flower of grass

[9] Lit. he

[10] Lit. shadow of change

[11] Lit. be swift for listening, slow for speaking

[12] Lit. the implanted word

24 you see, he looked attentively at himself and went away and immediately forgot what sort of a man he was!
25 But the one who stoops down to look carefully into the complete law,[15] the law[16] of liberty, and remains beside it, not being a forgetful hearer but an actual doer,[17] this person[18] will be blessed in what he does.[19]
¶ 26 If anyone thinks he is religious, while not holding his tongue in check[20] but deceiving his heart, the religion of this person[21] is worthless.
27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our[22] God and Father is this: going to see orphans and widows in their difficult circumstances *and* keeping oneself unspotted from the world.

D. By Faith Do Not Show Favoritism James 2:1-13

2 ¶ My brothers, stop holding faith in our Lord Jesus Christ of glory together with partiality.
2 You see, if a man comes into your assembly in splendid clothing with a gold ring on his finger and a poor man also comes in in filthy clothing,
3 and you turn your eyes upon the man wearing the splendid clothing and say, "As for you, you sit here in a good place," and to the poor man you say, "You, you stand *over* there or sit by my footstool,"
4 have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with wicked thoughts?
¶ 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, did God not choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and the heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?
6 But you, you treated the poor man shamefully! Do not the rich exercise harsh control over you and they themselves drag you into court?
7 As for them, do they not blaspheme the noble name by which you are called?[23]
8 If you are really carrying out the royal law in accordance with the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,"[24] you are doing what is right.
9 But if you are showing partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
10 For such ones as keep the whole law, but stumble in one *point*, have become guilty of *sinning against* all of it.
11 For he who said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,"[25] also said, "YOU SHALL NOT KILL;"[26] now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.
12 Always keep speaking and acting in such a manner as those who are about to be judged by means of the law of liberty.
13 For the judgment will be merciless to those who do not show mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

E. By Faith Do What Verifies Your Faith James 2:14-26

¶ 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Such faith[27] cannot save him, can it?

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[13] Lit. this one

[14] Lit. the face of his birth

[15] Here the term "law" is used in its widest sense as the Word of God; compare word of truth in1:18 and of the word in 1:22, 23

[16] Lit. the one

[17] Lit. a doer of work, or, a work-doer

[18] Lit. this one

[19] Lit. in his doing

[20] Lit. leading or guiding his tongue with a bit and bridle

[21] Lit. this one

[22] Lit. the

[23] Lit. that is called upon you

[24] Lev.19:18

[25] Ex.20:14; Dt.5:18

[26] Ex.20:13; Dt.5:17

[27] Lit. the

15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in need of daily nourishment,
16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep yourselves warm and eat your fill," but you do not give them the necessities of life for the body, what good is it?
17 In the same way also faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.
¶ 18 But someone says, "As for you, you have faith, and as for me, I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I myself will show you my faith from my[28] works.
19 You yourself believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe *that* and are horrified!
20 Now are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?
21 Was our father Abraham not declared righteous[29] as a result of works, when he offered up his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar?
22 You see that the faith was working together with his works and the faith was brought to its goal as a result of the works,
23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED[30] TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS,"[31] and he was called the friend of God.
24 You see that a man is declared righteous as a result of works and not as a result of faith alone.
25 Moreover in the same way, was Rahab, the prostitute, not also declared righteous as a result of works, because she welcomed the messengers and sent them out another way?
26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

F. By Faith Tame Your Tongue James 3:1-12

3 ¶ Let not many become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we *teachers* will receive a more intense judgment.[32]
2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, this man[33] is a perfect man, able to even hold his[34] whole body in check.
3 Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we *can* turn their whole body around.
4 Consider[35] also the ships. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the impulse of the helmsman desires;
5 in the same way also the tongue is a small member and yet it boasts great things.
¶ See how small a fire ignites[36] so great a forest!
6 Indeed the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of wrongdoing! The tongue exhibits itself among our members, *as* that which stains the whole body, both setting one's[37] course of life on fire and being set on fire by hell.
7 For every species[38] of wild animals and birds, of reptiles and sea creatures, is being tamed and has been tamed by human skill;[39]
8 but the tongue no one of mankind is able to tame; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who have been made according to the likeness of God;
10 from the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be this way.
11 Surely the spring does not gush forth *both* fresh[40] *water* and salt[41] *water* from the same opening, does it?

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[28] Lit. the

[29] Or, not justified

[30] Or, reckoned

[31] Gen.15:6

[32] Lit. a greater judgment

[33] Lit. this one

[34] Lit. the

[35] Lit. behold

[36] Lit. kindles, lights up

[37] Lit. the

[38] Lit. nature

[39] Lit. human nature

[40] Lit. sweet; likewise v.12

[41] Lit. bitter, meaning brackish; that is water mixed with salt, briny

12 My brothers, a fig tree cannot produce olives or a grapevine produce figs, can it? Neither can salt water produce fresh water.

G. By Faith Live by Divine Wisdom, Not Worldly Wisdom James 3:13-5:20

G.1 By Faith Live by the Wisdom from Above James 3:13-18

¶ 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show from his[42] excellent way of life his works in wisdom's gentleness.
14 But if you continue to have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, stop boasting and lying against the truth.
15 This wisdom is not one coming down from above; on the contrary, *it is* earthly, unspiritual, demonic;
16 for where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is unruliness and every evil thing.
17 Now the wisdom from above is first, to be sure, pure, then peaceful, yielding, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, without hypocrisy;
18 and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

G.2 By Faith Stop Being Friends with the World James 4:1-6

4 ¶ From what source is the conflicts and the quarrels among you? Is it not from this: from your pleasures that wage war in your members?
2 You lust after and yet you do not have. You murder and are filled with jealousy, and yet you cannot get what you want.[43] You fight and wage war! You do not have because you do not ask!
3 You ask and yet you do not receive, because you ask for the wrong reasons, in order that you may squander *what you receive* in your pleasures.
4 You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Therefore whoever intends to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
5 Or do you think the Scripture says to no purpose, "With jealousy the Spirit longs for what he caused to dwell in us?"
6 But he gives greater grace; for this reason he says,
"God opposes the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."[44]

G.3 By Faith Submit Yourselves to God James 4:7-10

¶7 Therefore subject yourselves to God; moreover, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded people![45]
9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned into mourning and *your* joy into gloom!
10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you!

G.4 By Faith Stop Speaking against One Another James 4:11, 12

¶ 11 Stop speaking against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law; moreover, if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of the law*.
12 There is one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and destroy; but who are you who judges your[46] neighbor?

G.5 By Faith Stop Banking on Your Plans James 4:13-17

¶ 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and we will spend a year there and carry on business and make a profit."
14 Such ones as you *say this* who do not know what your life *will be like* the next day! For you are a vapor that appears for a short time, and then disappears!
15 Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that."

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[42] Lit. the

[43] Lit. you cannot obtain

[44] Pro.3:34

[45] Lit. double-minded ones

[46] Lit. the

16 But now you boast in your impious and empty presumptions. All such boasting is wicked!
17 Therefore to the one who knows to do good, but does not do it, to him it is sin.

G.6 You Who Are Rich! Be Warned about Your Love of Worldly Wealth! James 5:1-6

5 ¶ Come now you rich![47] Sob and howl because of your miseries that are coming upon you!
2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten!
3 Your gold and silver have rusted! And their rust will be for a testimony against you[48] and will devour your flesh[49] like fire! You have stored up treasure in the last days!
4 Behold, the wages of the workmen who mowed your fields, (the wages withheld by you!) scream out, and the cries of those who harvested *your fields* have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts!
5 You have lived a life of self-indulgence and luxury upon the earth! You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter!
6 You have condemned, murdered, the righteous man![50] He does not resist you.

G.7 By Faith Wait Patiently for the Coming of the Lord James 5:7-11

7 Be patient then, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it until it receives the early and late rains.
8 And as for you, be patient, strengthen your hearts, because the coming of the Lord is near.
9 Stop complaining against one another, brothers, so that you are not judged. Behold, the Judge is standing at the doors!
10 As an example, brothers, of the suffering of bad things and of patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
11 Behold, we call those who endured blessed; you have heard of the patient endurance of Job and have seen the outcome from[51] the Lord, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.[52]

G.8 By Faith Do Not Make Oaths James 5:12

¶ 12 Above all, my brothers, stop swearing, neither by heaven nor by the earth nor by anything else;[53] rather let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

G.9 By Faith Pray for the Suffering and the Sick James 5:13-18

¶ 13 Is anyone among you suffering bad things? Let him pray! Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises!
14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him summon the elders of the church, and let them pray for him and anoint him with olive oil in the name of the Lord;
15 and the prayer offered in faith[54] will restore the one who is sick to health, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they will[55] be forgiven to him.
16 Therefore keep confessing your[56] sins to one another, and keep praying for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is able to do much when it is at work.
17 Elijah was a man who suffered the same misfortunes[57] as us, and he prayed with a prayer that it would not rain,[58] and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months;
18 and he prayed again, and the sky poured down[59] rain and the earth produced its fruit.

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[47] Lit rich ones

[48] Lit. to you

[49] Lit. fleshes

[50] Lit. righteous one

[51] Lit. of

[52] Lit. mercies

[53] Lit. any other thing

[54] Lit. prayer of faith

[55] Lit. it will

[56] Lit. the

[57] The Greek compound word is made up of the words "to suffer" and "like, same things"; it has been explained as meaning to be subject to the same incidents and exposed to the same frailties and evils, as well as to suffer like feelings with another person

[58] Lit. not to rain

G.10 By Faith Regain the Straying James 5:19, 20

¶ 19 My brothers, if anyone among you shall be led astray from the truth and someone turns him back,
20 let him know that the one who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from
death and will cover a multitude of sins.

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[59] Lit. gave